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AUTHOR Uemichi, Isao S.
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ABSTRACT

Language teaching through literature is based on the principle that literary works of art can give students intellectual pleasure. It should be revived in English language teaching in Japan because (1) it has the power to motivate students to learn a language they might not learn otherwise, (2) literature is readily available and applicable to a wide range of learners, and (3) this method is gaining support in the profession in other parts of the world. Poetry is a good starting place because the language is more concise, pure, abstract, and beautiful than in prose. Poems are easily memorized and will encourage students to use and consider the language in unfamiliar ways, and teach beautiful turns of phrase not available in any other text. Christina Rosetti's "Who Has Seen the Wind?" William Wordsworth's "Lucy Gray; or Solitude," P. B. Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind," and Ted Hughes' "Wind" provide a common theme that can be examined through direct instruction or left to the students to discover and examine. Short stories with various themes are also appropriate instructional materials because they are in prose that is close to everyday usage, are of a suitable length, can acquaint students with a variety of themes, and provide models of a variety of language styles. Ernest Hemingway's "Indian Camp," Erskine Caldwell's "The Visitor," and Virginia Woolf's "The Legacy" are examples of works that can be used well for this purpose. (MSE)

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LANGUAGE TEACHING THROUGH LITERATURE*

By Isao S. Uemichi

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*This is the revised version of my lecture delivered on the 24th March 1985 in Kyoto Chapter of Japan Association of Language Teachers.

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I-0-1. Introductory: Why Literature for Language Teaching?

For writing the present paper I have four reasons, two essential and two accidental. To begin with the essential ones, the first is that literature can be uniquely controversial, when used as text also for language teaching. There is no other material, I assume, that can provide students with more interesting subjects for discussion, and even further study, and provide them in such a readable manner, than literary works of art. It is, in addition, they alone that can give students alternative answers. This superiority of literary works of art as texts in the aspect of controversiality is very important for adult intellectual learners like university students. It is because, when they lose interest in the text, they often lose interest also in the language in which it is written. It is rare that they continue their study of the language, even after they have been disillusioned by their texts. This effect of texts on language learning should not be overlooked, especially in the countries like Japan where English is taught and learnt for neither the official use of it nor a means of communication. English is learnt, e.g. in Japan, as part of one's culture, i.e. as a sort of one's accomplishments. The motive of studying English in Japan is, therefore, weak, compared with that of those countries where English is a means of survival. Once the interest in learning English is lost in such countries, it is easy to imagine how difficult it will be to teach it, still more difficult to take back the lost interest again. It is, for this reason, vitally

important, I insist, that texts must intellectually be on a high level in such countries.

Another essential reason is the necessity I feel for the re-confirmation I must make, especially on this occasion, that language teaching through literature is fundamentally based on the pleasure principle, one of the most important conditions of teaching and learning languages. With literature as text, we can give students intellectuality, as proved above, and at the same time pleasure, too. In a word, literary works of art as texts can give students the intellectual pleasure characteristic of them. It is difficult to find such excellent texts as works of literature without them.

A third reason is that, besides those superiorities proved above as text, literature is ready at hand. It is essential, solely for the sake of convenience, that teaching materials should always be easily available to both teachers and students. Literature is further applicable to a wide range of learners, even below the intermediate level, though perhaps best suited to those students on the levels higher than the intermediate.

The last reason is that language teaching through literature seems to be reviving recently. The revival in England is reported, for instance, in *The EFL Gazette* from No 55 (July 1984) onwards. Now is the high time, I believe, to make some reaction to it from Japan, if ever. It must, in fact, be made known that Japan is a country where English has been taught through literay works of art, especially in universities and colleges, by Japanese professors. The method has been

so popular for so long, the reaction is now being made against it mainly by the teachers who are native speakers of English. If the method is no longer so welcome in Japan, it is because it looks as if the method did not suit well the 'communicative' purpose for which many strive. Traditionally good speakers of English are linguists in Japan and many teachers of literature cannot speak English well. Yet this fact does not necessarily suggest that the method is of little practicality for the 'communicative' competence more and more people wish to attain today, even in Japan.

I-1-0. Why to Start with Poetry?

I should like to begin with poetry, though it may be out of fashion. I should perhaps concentrate on prose works. The reason why I will start with poetry is that the language in poetry is more concise, pure or abstract and beautiful than in prose. This is a merit of poetry, also in the language class. It is for this reason that we can ask students to memorize a part, or the whole, of it. Poetry is 'the primordial source of language', according to Martin Heidegger in 'The Thinker as Poet', and 'language itself must be understood through the essence of poetry'.

I-1. *Who Has Seen the Wind?*

The first poem we shall examine is *Who Has Seen the Wind?* by Christina Rossetti. The reason why it is chosen here for the first poem is that it is very popular in Japan. The popularity of the poem may be measured by the fact that it is one of the first foreign poems the Japanese will learn in the original. It is taught in the Middle School, the last stage of the compulsory education in Japan. That is why there are few Japanese who do not know it. In addition, the poem is short and suitable for a text, especially for EFL and ESL. I am of the opinion that the material for a text should be complete by itself and original--that, if possible, it should not be part of a longer work or adapted for the text. *Who Has Seen the Wind?* meets this requisite. What is more, it is simple and easy. It will also be a good instance by which to demonstrate that the present method is applicable to a level much lower than the post-intermediate level we are aiming at. I am suggesting to use even fairy and folk tales for the classes appropriate for them.

In spite of the apparent simplicity, *Who Has Seen the Wind?* makes us wonder and think. Many teachers of English in Japan recommend their students to memorize it, thus trying to make them learn it *verbatim et literatim*. Fortunately the Japanese are temperamentally sympathetic with this kind of shorter poems dealing with Nature, owing perhaps to the apparent similarity to the *haiku* and the *waka* in their traditional culture. It is, therefore, good to start with such

a poem.

I-2. *Lucy Gray; or, Solitude*

The second poem we shall discuss is *Lucy Gray; or, Solitude* by William Wordsworth. This poem is more sophisticated than *Who Has Seen the Wind?*. It may be said that it is more artistic. And it may be more difficult. But it is more interesting as a poem.

Lucy is a pretty country girl. We can meet her anywhere. She was also kind-hearted. She loved her parents very much, perhaps as much as, or even more than, she was loved by them. This is why, in answer to her father's request, she went to the town, one afternoon, to meet her mother, though the storm was coming. And she was lost. But it is believed that she is 'still a living child'. She has been transformed into the wind that haunts the wide moor. She is the spirit of the wind.

Those who read this poem will tend to ask who Lucy is. This may be natural, as she is so cute and attractive, but the question has been considered irrelevant. There are so many, indeed too many, models of her. It has been agreed, nevertheless, that she is Dorothy Wordsworth. During the Goslar years in which *Lucy Gray; or, Solitude* was composed, the poet at once loved and hated her. It has been pointed out that Lucy is for this reason lost and dies in the poem, while she is represented as such a darling. Lucy is an expression of

the poet's ambivalence towards her.

This kind of biographical reference is useful also for language teaching, if students are only interested in it. It is because, to have the biographical knowledge, they must read books, possibly in English, and, if further urged properly, speak and write about it in English. This will provide them with opportunities of language practice in many respects.

Another interest in this particular poem will be why in it Wordsworth represented the wind in the shape of a little girl. Traditionally, in the West, the wind is represented as male, as with Aeolus or Zephyrus and Favonius in the *Ode to the West Wind*, as we shall examine next. It is true that, as mentioned above, William Wordsworth had Dorothy in his mind, when he composed the poem under discussion, but I am afraid this is not enough to explain why he had to identify the wind with a girl.

I-3. *Ode to the West Wind*

The third poem is the *Ode to the West Wind* by P. B. Shelley. For the choice of this poem I have once again three reasons. A first is again that the poem is popular in Japan. Particularly popular is its last line, 'When winter comes, spring is not far behind', though, to my regret, in the Japanese translation: *'Huyu kitarinaba haru tohkaraji'*. When this line is referred to in Japanese, Japanese

students will at once make a notable response and reveal their interest in the poem. And many of them wish to learn the rest of the poem. It is, thus, recommendable in the language class to use those poems, a line or two of which are, at least, popular in the culture where they are to be taught. Wishing to recite those popular lines in the original language, students will be eager to learn the poems and the language in which they are written.

Another reason is that the *Ode to the West Wind* exerts a considerable influence on the modern Japanese poetry. One of the most notable examples was on *Aki Kaze no Uta (The Poem of the Autumn Wind)* by Tohson Shimazaki. It is believed that this Japanese poem was composed in the tradition of the Japanese poetry, even of *Yohkyoku* or *noh* songs, while the influence of the Chinese poetry cannot be denied either. It is, nevertheless, different from ordinary Japanese poems in both the conception and the treatment of the subject. This is why it has been welcome as one of the examples of Japanese poems under the influence of the Western poetry. And because the Japanese poet is one of the favourites of the Japanese, the original poem is as often discussed as *Aki Kaze no Uta*.

The last reason for the choice of the poem here is that it has much in common with the other poems discussed in the present paper. This poem also represents the wind. The wind is described here as the force, as well as the symbol, of the cycle of the seasons and even of death and rebirth. The wind is treated as the natural force, often the power of destruction and at the same time also as the power of

regeneration or a manifestation of the creative principle. As often pointed out, in addition, the *Ode to the West Wind* is also a poem essentially about the verbal power. It is, therefore, appropriate to use it as a text for learning English, while it is meaningful to study such a poem as a literary work of art.

I-4. *Wind*

We have discussed, I am afraid, the favourable aspect, more than the negative aspect, of the wind. As one of the elements, however, the wind also has a destructive power and has been feared since the pre-historic days. It is feared even today as typhoons, tornadoes, hurricanes, cyclones, etc. It is such a fearful and barren power of the wind that Ted Hughes represents in his *Wind*. I do not know why the Poet Laureate wanted to deal with that aspect of the wind in this particular poem. In *A Wind Flashes the Grass*, another poem in *The Selected Poems: 1957-1981* in which the *Wind* is also included, he represents the wind with more sympathy and tenderness.

I-5. Conclusion: Merits of Thematolgy in Language Teaching

As demonstrated above, the examination and discussion of one common theme by the use of various poems is very useful, even for

language teaching. The method may, strictly speaking, be a little different from what is widely considered the Thematology or the History of Ideas, as it does not primarily deal with the historical development of the theme. But the method will none the less deepen our understanding of a given subject. In addition, by this method students are urged to make a new attempt at using English in a way hitherto unfamiliar to them, as they are stepping into a new territory in both thinking and speech.

Another merit of this method in teaching a language is that, after having studied a couple of poems, smart students will get aware by themselves of the common theme they are pursuing and thus, before the next poem has been introduced, they can somehow make themselves ready for it. And this way of preparation seems to them to be a stimulus for a further study. It is the intellectual excitement as well as the pleasure indispensable for language learning. What is more advantageous of the present method is that, in spite of the repetitive discussion of a common theme, students will never get so bored as with the other materials with a common theme, because no two poems can ever be the same.

Furthermore, with poems as texts, students can learn many beautiful turns of phrases they can never learn from any other texts. It is indeed most important that a language should be learnt to make possible a correct and precise communication through it. On the advanced levels, however, maturer and subtler expressions are also required and for those purposes, I think, poems will serve well.

II-0. Introductory: Why Short Stories with Various Themes?

Now we shall turn to short stories in prose. Short stories in prose may be as suitable for texts as, or even more suitable than, such short poems as we have just discussed above. It is because they are in prose, though still bookish, which students should learn above all, especially in EFL and ESL classes. In view of sentence structures, colloquialism, etc., i.e. applicability to daily life, literature in prose is better for the language text, even on higher levels, than in verse. In this sense, I am of the opinion that various quotations from Shakespeare I often find in EFL and ESL texts with no convincing reasons are harmful rather than just useless.

In addition, short stories are appropriate in length, when used in university classrooms. You can finish with them in one period of 90-100 minutes, though you may not with novels. And yet many of them are as interesting and instructive as novels.

A next requisite of short stories for texts will be that they must be modern or contemporary. Up-to-date should the prose as well as the subjects be, particularly in EFL and ESL texts. It is of little use, for the students in those classes, to learn with effort antiquated expressions and customs.

A third merit in using short stories as texts is that students can be acquainted with variety of themes almost as various as the number of stories they will read. Of course, the subjects of the short stories in the Second Part of the present paper may, for instance, be

reduced to some common themes such as love, life and death, (the difference between) appearance and reality, etc. Some may, therefore, claim that, however different they may look, short stories to be read in one course tend to have but a couple of common themes. And, in fact, that may be easier in both the treatment of them and the conduct of the class. But it will be more profitable and more interesting to deal with the following stories as they are, i.e. in terms of their own subjects, e.g. education, life and death, difference of cultures, love, diary, alienation, etc. It is for the demonstration of this purpose that I have chosen those stories in the Second Part.

One more merit of using short stories in prose, especially in EFL and ESL classes, is that, because we can use many of them in one semester, students will be given more opportunities of hearing and/or reading as many different models of English as they should. This exposure to the different models of English is important or even essential for the language learners, but, at least in Japanese universities, I am of the opinion that ordinary students should only learn British or American English as the standard model of English. I shall dare to go even further to recommend them to learn the former, if they have no preference. It is because, as already mentioned, English is often learnt in Japan as one's accomplishments, a part of one's culture. The majority of them will never use it throughout their lives. It must, and this is why it should, be the best model, somewhat Victorian and old-fashioned as it may be, if they ever learn it. This is why in the present paper I am only making use of British poems and

British and American stories.

II-1. *Indian Camp*

The first story we are going to discuss is the *Indian Camp* by Ernest Hemingway. This universally appreciated story, the first Nick Adams story in *In Our Time*, is very useful as a text, because it is not only well-constructed and well-written but apparently easy as well, while it has many subjects worthy of discussion in it.

One of the most important subjects to be discussed in the story will be the education of a son by the father. What is particulary noteworthy about it is that it is the traditional style of education in America, and perhaps also in Europe, though rarely in Asia where the basis of life has been built on agriculture and matriarchal system. It is often pointed out, however, that, particularly in large cities, this tradition is no longer preserved even in America. Yet, to prove how traditionally American it is, it will suffice to quote Alvin Toffler in the *Future Shock*. He mentions in it some of those examples as the American popular culture.

This subject under discussion, the education of a son by the father, will invite another subject of discussion, the difference between cultures. This subject is important in and by itself, especially in the language class, but it will become more significant, when it is noticed that Nick's father seems to suggest to his son by his own

act that their culture is superior to the other, while many of Hemingway's heroes try to live in an unsophisticated way as natural men. What is important now, for Nick, is to realize, as he did, the difference between the cultures and, possibly, the superiority of his own to be a good successor to it.

Thus, in *Indian Camp*, we shall come across many contrasts. Another example worthy of discussion will be Nick's experience of birth, i.e. life and death as a violence. It may have been a great shock, for him, to experience them for the first time and at once, but he may have grown greatly through the experience.

Another set of contrasts, light: warm and dark: cold, should not be overlooked either. It is even symbolic. The story begins in the chilly darkness of the early morning which foretells the dark prospects of the story, while the story ends in the light of the morning in which, sitting in the stern of the boat with his father rowing, Nick felt quite sure that he would never die. At this time he even felt the water was warm, when he dipped his hand in the river. Likewise some contrasts are used in combination with others and not infrequently they make themselves even more effective than by themselves.

In addition, some contrasts are used to represent the difference between appearance and reality. One of the most notable instances of duality of this kind is the successful Caesarean operation without anaesthetic as a brave act of duty and co-operation, on the one hand, between different races and, on the other, as an act of such cruelty and pain as to have driven the Indian husband, who could not have

suffered it, to commit suicide and, for that reason, fear that a revenge would be made, though everything looked to have gone well. Nick realized this crisis, when he got aware of the absence of Uncle George on his way home. Nick's question to his father if dying is hard, subsequent to the scene, sounds, for this reason, particularly pathetic to me. It is what may be called the Moment of Illumination, the Moment of Discovery, or the Eternal Moment through which everything will be made clear all of a sudden and with which all the good stories are somehow provided. And it is also through this moment that we shall realize how the *Indian Camp* is under the shade of death and why it is read so widely and timelessly.

II-2. *The Visitor*

The next story to discuss is *The Visitor* by Erskine Caldwell. This is also an American story, but unlike the *Indian Camp*, it has a much warmer atmosphere fit for a love story. Indeed the climate in the story is June, the 'season of romance', as defined by Northrop Frye in the *Anatomy of Criticism*. The story is popular among university students, perhaps because they can easily identify themselves with one of the characters who are about their age and many of them also have the similar experience in their own lives.

What will attract the attention of the reader most in *The Visitor* will be why Drue was introduced. By her introduction each of the

three main characters can take the part of the protagonist. It depends on how the story is read, though, judging from the title of the story, Drue may most likely be the one. It is singular of the story, which is, for that reason, particularly useful for a text, that a discussion can be had about who the protagonist should be. The subject will provide students with opportunities of controversy as well as pleasure essential for language learning, especially on the levels higher than the intermediate.

Another subject of interest will be whether the story should be read as a love story or a story of lost love. If taken as the former, it is a love story between Bob and Drue. And this may be the majority opinion. It is evident that the story gets interesting by the introduction of Drue. Without her the story would be dull, if ever written and most probably would not have been written. The introduction of Drue and her love with Bob must be central to the story. Yet the story may also be read otherwise: Laura's loss of Bob, in spite of her love for him.

The next subject of discussion will be whether Bob should be judged as moral or not. It is because Bob was honest to his feeling and faithful to both Laura and Drue that he expressed his love for, and made love with, the latter. He could go on with Laura, even after that, making excuses. But he seemed not to. The argument on the subject of moral values such as this is interesting and rewarding in itself, but indeed much more so, when students, particularly in EFL and ESL classes, consist of many nationalities representing different

customs in their own cultures.

Finally we have come back to the first and the central question, why Laura should have introduced Drue to Bob, even at the risk of losing him. I wonder if it was to test Bob's mind, of which she had to be certain by all means, before their marriage. Or else, it was because Laura knew almost instinctively that, when he was to go to a city sooner or later to get a job, he would leave her. To keep his attention to her, she was urged to introduce to him a city girl not only more attractive than she but also the most attractive among her friends.

One of the unexpected answers to this question will be that Laura had to be freed from Bob and asked Drue to help her. Suppose she had been in love with another boy of whom Bob had no idea and wished to get rid of him. In such a case, best would be the means Laura took. Laura and Drue were no rivals, but friends as ever who now fought the common front against Bob. He was, then, not a victor, as he appeared, but a victim.

II-3. *The Legacy*

The last story is *The Legacy* by Virginia Woolf. This English story tells you in retrospect--in the form of a diary--the marital life of Angela Clandon, the heroine. The diary is the legacy she leaves to her husband.

Gilbert Clandon, Angela's husband, was left puzzled with her legacy. He could not understand why his wife should have committed suicide. This is the central problem of the story. The problem seems to be easily solved, if the story is understood as it is written. Isolated from her husband, Angela found herself lonely and useless, especially in her later years. It was necessary, for her, to find, as she did, her new causes of life, e.g. the help of poor people and her interest in B. M. But B. M. killed himself, having been disappointed by her indecision. In order to rejoin him, she committed suicide and escaped from Gilbert. As the wife of a successful politician, she was not so happy as she was supposed to be. Once again it may be pointed out that, as in the *Indian Camp*, appearance is different from reality.

Although she might appear lonely and miserable, as if she had been a victim of isolation, it is Angela that was cruel and demonic. She need not have told her relationship with B. M. to Gilbert who seemed to know nothing about him. She could have destroyed her diary, before she committed suicide, as she was so orderly and considerate as to have left 'some little token of her affection' to every friend. But she did not destroy her diary. It may be that a diary is kept to be read, though it may be widely considered as one of the most private activities.

Besides that simple way of reading shown above, another interpretation may be made of the story. It is that most probably Angela was more isolated and more miserable than she is generally assumed. Her

alienation may have been so extreme, though she pretended as if it had not been so, that she could no longer go along with her husband, as his wife should, if she had been asked to, though she wished to. The last two sentences of the story may, then, be read as follows: 'She had stpped off the kerb to rejoin her lover', i.e. her husband. Although there appeared to be millions of chances for her resumption, she knew that any remedy was too late to work on her. It is only in fancy that she could have rejoined her husband. To rejoin him, even in fancy, 'she stepped off the kerb to escape from him', i.e. B. M. Her diary is the confession of her loneliness and isolation, her misery and sin, rather than the declaration of her liberation from her husband and the glorious rebirth as a new woman. The diary ends with what she must tell her husband as truth. The truth is that, though Gilbert may still have been unaware of it, she wanted her cause of death, having lost her cause of life a long time ago. B. M. was that cause, fictional as he might have been.

II-4. Conclusion: Merits of the Present Methods

The best merit of the present method will be that it has more merits than demerits and those demerits are few.

A second merit will be that the method is easy to be applied in any circumstances. It is, in a word, very practicable. It is applicable not only to the variety of teaching courses but also without

much modification and difficulty. It can be employed, e.g. in the courses of literature domestic, foreign and comparative and of thematology, not to mention the language teaching courses with which we are concerned.

In addition, the employment of the present method will scarcely be limited by the achievement and the ability of students. The method functions well from the pre-intermediate, as demonstrated in the present paper by *Who Has Seen the Wind?*, up to the post-intermediate level. What may matter will only be the good choice of texts which will not prevent the method from functioning well.

The present method is also for multi-purpose. It may be used, even within the range of language teaching, with the objectives of listening comprehension, note-taking, reading, translation, discussion, etc.

Besides those merits enumerated above, the present method will satisfy students in more ways than any other methods. If they should have learnt or mastered the target language less than they anticipated at the time the method was employed, they can still have some pleasure and knowledge of literature, perhaps together with a deeper insight into life through it.

Moreover the present method can be applied to any size of the class. It is convenient, for the teacher as well as the adminstrator of the programme, not to think of the number of students in a class, when they are going to apply the method to them. What is more convenient is that the method may be employed at any time for any length of

time.

The final merit of the present method is that it is economic. No expensive equipments are necessary for the adoption of this method. With a tape-recorder and some cassettes the method will work well and the effect will be as great as one can expect of it.